



June 12, 2014

Key Quality of Life Issues Supporting Service Members and Families

Defense State Liaison Office

Background

Since many issues surrounding quality of life and family well-being can only be addressed by states, the Department of Defense started the USA4 Military Families initiative, worked through the DoD State Liaison Office, to engage and educate state policymakers, not-for-profit associations, concerned business interests and other state leaders about the needs of military members and their families. Currently, efforts are being focused on the following 10 key issues, as approved by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness, which promote the quality of life and family well-being of our service members.

Quality of Life Issues:

1. Facilitate service members receiving licensure and academic credit for military education, training and experience: Separating service members leave the military with documented training and experience that can prepare them for civilian employment; however, this documentation is not always used by state entities to qualify them for licenses required for their occupation or to provide them academic credit.
2. Facilitate military spouse transition through licensure portability and eligibility for unemployment compensation: Many occupations require a state license, often with state-specific conditions and processes, which can cause lengthy reemployment delays for military spouses moving between states. Because of these delays and the expense involved in re-licensure, many spouses decide not to practice in their professions. This is a difficult financial and career choice issue for military members and their spouses, potentially impacting their desire to stay in the military. Unemployment compensation is important to military families who cannot afford to lose income during a military move. Military families move to fulfill military requirements, and spouses should not be penalized by states for voluntarily leaving employment.
3. Support development of veterans treatment courts open to eligible veterans and service members throughout the state: The veterans treatment court is an innovative and effective means for veterans with mental health conditions or substance addictions to obtain treatment and services to resolve outstanding

- criminal offenses and stabilize their lives. Veterans treatment courts show great promise to help these service members transition back to their communities and families in a healthful and productive manner.
4. Increase access to quality, affordable child care for military families: As part of the DoD Child Care Expansion Initiative, states establish or improve Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and assessment methods for child care programs that are compatible with the DoD effectiveness standards and oversight. Through statewide QRISs and licensing requirements, DoD can identify providers eligible for approved status (subsidized care) and partner with other providers to help them become approved.
 5. Promote consumer protections and enforcement of the predatory lending regulation: Military consumers are vulnerable to unscrupulous practices. Additionally, some lending practices create a cycle of debt, thus detracting from financial well-being and military readiness. States can help by working with the military community on consumer concerns and by fully enforcing the Department of Defense Regulation on payday, vehicle title and refund anticipation loans.
 6. Allow service members to retain their earned priority for receiving Medicaid home and community care waivers: States can use 1915(c) waivers to the Social Security Act to provide home and community-based services to individuals who are at risk of institutionalization in a hospital, nursing home or intermediate care facility for individuals with mental retardation. Although the TRICARE Extended Health Care Option program is designed to assist military families with covering the cost of care for family members with special needs, the program may not address all care requirements and does not extend to families once they leave active duty.
 7. Improve absentee voting for military members and their families: Citizens need assurance their vote will be counted. States can approve the Uniform Military and Overseas Voter Act, which supports the flexible processes for absentee voters in the areas recommended by the Federal Voting Assistance Program office.
 8. Waive required waiting time to establish residency for separating service members to obtain in-state tuition rate: The post-9/11 GI Bill® only pays in-state tuition and eligible fees. Veterans who settle in states other than their state of residence upon separating from the service are initially charged out-of-state tuition, which means they must pay the difference between the resident and non-resident charges. Waiving the time requirement for residency, provided separating service members are completing the remaining steps to establish residency, allows them to attend the first year at a state school within the amount paid through the GI Bill®.
 9. Assign an identifier for military children in education data systems: By identifying military children and providing data on their attendance and education outcomes,

states can assist DoD in developing policy and military child education initiatives. Apart from recent initiatives in a few states, only the U.S. Department of Education Impact Aid Program collects data on the number of military-connected students by school districts.

10. Create statewide memoranda of understanding between the DoD and the state child welfare agency to standardize relationships: Current DoD policy encourages military commands to develop memoranda of understanding, or MoUs, with local civilian child welfare agencies to ensure the cooperation and reciprocal reporting of child abuse and neglect. Consequently, critical guidelines and procedures for handling military children placed in protective custody, foster care or other out of home placements may be inconsistent and leave gaps in coverage.

For more information:

USA4 Military Families, <http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil>